

Message Text

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TO AMEMBASSY DAKAR IMMEDIATE

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E.O. 11652: NA

TAGS: TBIO SENV SG

SUBJECT: MARINE MAMMAL PROTECTION ACT: MARINE MAMMAL
COMMISSION

FOR DR. ROBERT M. WHITE

1. MARINE MAMMAL COMMISSION ADVICE RECEIVED AS FOLLOWS:
QUOTE. WE NOTED IN OUR LETTER OF 29 MAY THAT THE DETER-
MINATION OF THE PRECISE DATE OR AGE OF CESSATION OF NURSING
IS MOST DIFFICULT. PUPS ARE APPARENTLY STILL TAKING MILK
THROUGH SEPTEMBER AND INTO OCTOBER; AT WHICH TIME THE COWS
ABANDON THE PUPS AND WEANING IS COMPLETE. LIMITED FOOD

HABIT STUDIES INDICATE THAT PUPS BEGIN TO FORAGE ON THEIR
OWN AS EARLY AS JUNE, WITH DECREASING INTAKE OF MILK AND
INCREASING CONSUMPTION OF SOLID FOOD LEADING UP TO COMPLETE
WEANING IN SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER. WHETHER OR NOT NURSING DUR-
ING THIS PERIOD IS OBLIGATORY FOR THE HEALTH AND DEVELOP-
MENT OF THE PUP IS UNKNOWN AND, AS DR. BEST HIMSELF STATES,
"(W)ITHOUT DIRECT OBSERVATIONAL DATA IT IS NOT POSSIBLE TO
BE MORE PRECISE AT PRESENT ABOUT THE SUCKLING BEHAVIOR OF
YEARLINGS." ANY DETERMINATION ON OUR PART AS TO THE TIME
AT WHICH OBLIGATE NURSING CEASES WOULD NECESSARILY BE BASED
UPON INFERENCE FROM INADEQUATE INFORMATION.

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2. THE COMMISSION AND COMMITTEE OF SCIENTIFIC ADVISORS ON

MARINE MAMMALS ARE IMPRESSED WITH THE EFFORTS OF THE

GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA TO STRUCTURE A FUR SEAL PROGRAM DESIGNED TO RESTORE THE SEAL POPULATIONS. THE POPULATION HAS INCREASED SUBSTANTIALLY IN RECENT YEARS, AND THE CONTINUING APPEARANCE OF NEW SEAL COLONIES INDICATES THAT THE INCREASE HAS CONTINUED DESPITE ANNUAL HARVESTS. THE EVIDENCE SUGGESTS THAT THE ONGOING MANAGEMENT PROGRAM IS INDEED ALLOWING THE RESTORATION OF POPULATIONS TO LEVELS WHICH WE HOPE WILL REACH THOSE CONSISTENT WITH THE OBJECTIVES OF THE MARINE MAMMAL PROTECTION ACT.

3. DESPITE THE APPARENT INCREASES IN FUR SEAL POPULATIONS, HOWEVER, THE COMMISSION SUGGESTS THAT THE INABILITY TO DETERMINE WHETHER PUPS TAKEN PURSUANT TO THE PROGRAM OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA ARE ENGAGED IN OBLIGATORY AS DISTINGUISHED FROM CONVENIENCE NURSING, IF THAT DISTINCTION IS RELEVANT UNDER THE ACT, PRECLUDES A DETERMINATION THAT SUCH PUPS WERE NOT NURSING AT THE TIME OF

TAKING. WE SUGGEST THAT IMPORTATION OF SKINS OF SUCH PUPS WOULD THEREFORE BE INCONSISTENT WITH SECTION 102(B)(2) OF THE ACT WHICH PROHIBITS SUCH IMPORTATION OF SKINS IF THE ANIMALS WERE NURSING AT THE TIME OF TAKING. UNQUOTE. PREPARING TO ADVISE SECRETARY. PLEASE RESPOND URGENTLY. INGERSOLL

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